



Indian Health Service

Update

IHS/PHS/HCFA Initiative

For more information on the Policy Exchange Initiative, contact: J. T. Garrett, Ed.D., Acting Chief, Health Care Administration, Office of Health Programs, IHS, 301-443-8373.

A concern of the Office of the Director, Indian Health Service (IHS), is whether agencies of Federal and State Governments understand the unique relationship that exists with American Indian and Alaska Native tribes as sovereign governments. To increase that understanding, the Director of the IHS initiated discussions with the Public Health Service (PHS) Operating Divisions of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA). As a result of those discussions, a IHS/PHS/HCFA Steering Group was established in May 1994.

The regular meetings of the Steering Group bring Indian health care issues to the table, particularly as they relate to the impact of Federal decisions on American Indian and Alaska Native people and governments. The meetings also foster the development of an understanding of the position that States have taken in responding to their Indian populations because of the unique relationship they have with the Federal Government. The work of the Steering Group, with its Federal decision-making focus, ties in with the IHS State Initiative Workgroup that has a State decision-making focus.

Discussions of the Steering Group have focused on State proposals for 1115 Waivers under State health care reform initiatives, conditions of participation and certification, and reforms on reimbursements related to Medicare and Medicaid. Discussions have also focused on expanding the current interpretation on the matching rate to include tribes and tribal organizations at the 100 percent rate. Ways to jointly resolve issues encompassed strategies to increase knowledge, develop agreements, propose guidelines, or draft legislative language to improve financial participation and to maximize reimbursement under Medicare and Medicaid.

Because decisions related to Government programs that affect American Indian and Alaska Native people are of critical importance to the IHS, tribal governments, and urban health programs, the Steering Group established specific working groups that include tribal representation in their membership. The specific working groups are: Medicaid Eligibility; Survey, Certification, and Licensure; Availability of Federal Financial Participation; Managed Care; Transportation; Cultural Diversity; Long Term Care; Mental Health and Substance Abuse; and Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health Issues.